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FM AMEMBASSY HARARE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2418  
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY  
RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 1825  
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 1736  
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 1862  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0456  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1139  
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1496  
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 1918  
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4346  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0989  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC//DHO-7//  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC  
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC  
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK//DOOC/ECMO/CC/DAO/DOB/DOI//  
RUEPGBA/CDR USEUCOM INTEL VAIHINGEN GE//ECJ23-CH/ECJ5M//

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000067

SIPDIS

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NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN  
USAID FOR L.DOBBS AND E. LOKEN  
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU  
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/23/2018  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#) [ASEC](#)  
SUBJECT: POLICE SHUTDOWN MARCH, BUT MDC MANAGES TO RALLY

REF: HARARE 00042

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY AMB. JAMES D. MCGEE FOR REASONS 1.4 (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On January 23, a magistrate's court upheld the police ban on a planned Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) protest march, but gave permission for the MDC to hold a rally. Police responded with violence to efforts by MDC supporters to march to the rally location, in defiance of the court order. Emboffs estimate that about a thousand protesters ultimately assembled near the announced rally point; MDC leaders later claimed 30,000 participants. The events of January 23, which began with the detention of MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai, support MDC charges that the GOZ has no intention of leveling the playing field before elections. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On January 23, at about 4:00 am, police dragged MDC president Morgan Tsvangirai from his home and interrogated him at police headquarters regarding a planned MDC demonstration. Tsvangirai was released several hours later. After his release he informed the Ambassador that he had not been harmed.

¶3. (U) On January 18 the police had given written permission for a January 23 MDC march, but on January 21 the authorities rescinded the permit citing unspecified "intelligence." The MDC challenged the decision in court and a hearing was set for the morning of January 23. Only an hour before the planned start time of the march, a magistrate gave permission for the rally, but upheld the denial to march citing public security concerns.

¶4. (U) At 1:00 PM a group of about 200 opposition supporters set out from MDC headquarters marching west against traffic along Nelson Mandela Avenue heading toward the Magistrates Court. Scores of supporters joined the group which quickly swelled to more than 350 marchers, who were dancing in the streets, blowing whistles, and waving posters. Several truck loads of riot police descended on the marchers and used tear

gas and batons to disperse them.

15. (U) Small groups of about 25 MDC supporters then engaged police in running clashes over a six block area for approximately 30 minutes. Police went after the groups with batons, tear gas, and dogs. In one encounter, police were seen beating at least five marchers on the ground before forcing them into an unmarked truck. Some marchers were seen throwing rocks at police.

16. (U) An estimated 1,000 MDC supporters later gathered in a large open field near the announced rally point, where they sang songs, danced, and listened to speeches. A large contingent of riot police, with two water cannon trucks, observed the event from a distance. The group peacefully dispersed after approximately one hour.

17. (U) The government tried to dissuade MDC supporters from turning out today by threatening a strong show of police force and sowing confusion. A January 22 headline in the state-run Herald newspaper read "MDC March Called-off," and government radio reported the march was prohibited and would not take place. On the morning of the march, police erected roadblocks along all major arteries coming into the city center.

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Comment  
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18. (C) The opposition had hoped to attract a crowd like the 10,000 plus that turned out for a rally in one of Harare's

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high-density suburbs over the weekend (reftel); government-sown confusion and threat of force kept the numbers down. In an effort to spin what turned out to be a disappointing turnout, MDC spokesperson Nelson Chamisa told us that upwards of 30,000 people had marched and gathered, and Tsvangirai confirmed this figure to the Ambassador. Embassy officers who observed the march estimated there were only several hundred participants marching and about 1,000 at the rally itself. Police rescission of permission to march, not to mention the use of force to disperse marchers, represents a GOZ derogation from the spirit of the SADC talks that are intended to open up democratic space and provide a level electoral playing field for the opposition.  
MCGEE